

Amendments to the Claims

Please amend claim 4. The Claim Listing below will replace all prior versions of the claims in the application:

Claim Listing

1. (Original) In a network system that connects a central location with a large number of network devices, a method for balancing the coordination of responses to connection requests originating at the network devices comprising the steps of:
 - sending a router availability message through a designated router to a specific network device, the designated router located at the central location;
 - sending a connection request message from a specific network device to the central location through the router indicated by a received router availability message, and only in response to receiving a router availability message at the specific network device;
 - forwarding the connection request message to the central location; and
 - reassigning connection requests from a specific network device to a router under control of the central location, so that connection requests remain distributed among a number of available routers.
2. (Original) A method as in claim 1 wherein the router availability message is repeated at a rate which depends upon the relative availability of the router to service the message.
3. (Original) A method as in claim 1 wherein the messages are connection request messages originating from a network devices requesting that a connection be made to the central location.
4. (Currently amended) A method as in claim 1 wherein [[.]] the router availability message indicates a network address at which the network device may respond.
5. (Original) A method as in claim 1 wherein the router availability message is sent as a multicast message to a specific group of network devices.

6. (Original) A method as in claim 1 wherein the router availability message represents a right for the network device to connect to the router for a limited time only.